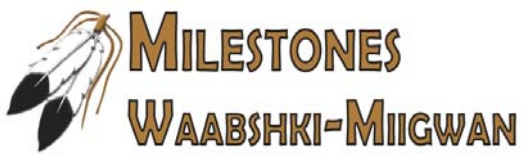


# MILESTONES - FROM A TRIBAL ELDER



Submitted by the LTBB Adult  
Drug Court Program

## A Tribal Elders Story of Sobriety

I was born in Charlevoix, MI, and grew up on Carpenter Avenue in an area people referred to as Indian Town or John Town. The name John Town was used as many of the residents of the area were descendants of the Peter John family. This area was inhabited mostly by Native American people.

I am now a tribal elder as I complete my journey through the Circle of Life, I often recall the days of my youth growing up in a Native environment. My days as a youth were very enjoyable; I spent many days hunting, fishing, swimming and gathering the wonderful gifts the Creator provided to us through Mother Earth. Many of my other summer days were spent caddying at the local golf course. My summer evenings, I played softball on a team with tribal men. As I was just a youngster, I considered them to be tribal elders.

The days of my youth were bad times for the Native people. There was very much prejudice and ill treatment of all Natives. The Natives had a hard time finding employment, and when they did obtain employment, it was the dirty, lowest paying jobs available.

These were sad times for Native people, and many of them turned to alcohol to drown their sorrow; although I did

not approve of this, I did not condemn them as I did understand why this was happening.

One of the big events of my youth was when the men on my softball team said they wanted to have a meeting with me to discuss my future. I had no idea what they were going to discuss. They started out by saying alcohol had ruined their lives, and alcohol use had cast a bad image upon all Native people. They pleaded with me to not use alcohol and to continue with my education. They said go to school, live a good, clean life, become a good student and participate in high school sports. They stated go show those non-Natives we Indians are as good as them. This conversation had a tremendous effect on the way I lived my life. These were kind, caring people, and I did not want to disappoint them.

I became a good student in school, and as I continued my education, my Native friends started dropping out of school, much of it due to the stress from prejudice they could no longer tolerate.

My high school years were good years; I participated in high school sports, which included football, basketball, baseball and track. The big problem I encountered during these years was the peer pressure from my friends; they were always trying to get me involved in the use of alcohol or beer. I always declined, but it was difficult. This led me to believe many of our youth travel the wrong path due to pressure from their friends. Peer pressure can create a lot of problems for our youth.

My final year in high school, I was the only Native student in my graduating

class; all my Native friends had dropped out of school. I felt honored when I was elected Vice President of my senior class. After graduation, seeking employment was easier for me than it was for many of my peers as I had a clean background record.

I obtained employment with the Michigan State Police. After retiring from the state police, my wife and I returned to the local area where I was born and raised.

I became involved with my tribe, and I was appointed to the Gaming Administration, which later was renamed the Gaming Board of Directors. While serving in this position, I was elected to a four-year term as Vice Chairperson of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, which necessitated my resignation from the Gaming Board of Directors as our Constitution prohibits serving in these two positions at the same time. A few months after serving my four-year term as Vice Chairperson, I applied for and obtained a grant-funded position with the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians Tribal Court.

As stated earlier, I am now a tribal elder; I am pleased with the way I lived my life. I have had a good marriage, a good family, and a successful employment history, which I believe is largely due to my sobriety and no other substance abuse. Looking back, any success I have had is due to my tribal elders and the Creator. For this, I thank my tribal elders and the Creator.

*Submitted by a Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians Tribal Elder.*